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Middle East Situation Report #29
(as of 1100 EST, 3 February 1984)

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LEBANON/SYRIA

[Redacted] shelling of the Hasmiyyah neighborhood in the southeastern section of the capital began yesterday afternoon and intensified through the night. The Gemayel government and the Army appear confused as efforts continue to arrange a cease-fire.

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- The Army lost but regained control of a checkpoint near the Galerie Seman Crossing on the Green Line--the former confrontation line between East and West Beirut.
- The presidential palace at Baabda and the ambassador's residence were slightly damaged in the shelling.
- Druze leader Walid Junblatt held a meeting of opposition leaders at his home in Mukhtarah yesterday and is expected to fly to Damascus later today to make a statement about the current situation.

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The airport remains open, and there has been no shelling of Marine positions.

[Redacted]

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The fighting does not appear to be the beginning of a coordinated anti-government offensive, but rather Druze and Shia reaction to the rumored Army offensive. It is possible that anti-government forces were trying to "send a message" to the government, warning of the consequences of an Army move.

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- The currently tense situation, however, could degenerate into widespread fighting. There is no further information on Druze intentions beyond what appeared in the publications this morning.
- The town of Zahlah in the Bekaa Valley was shelled last night for the first time since April 1981. Opposition forces presumably with Syrian acquiescence, may have shelled the town to remind the government that Christians in the Bekaa are hostage to government restraint.

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IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Tehran responded to Baghdad's threat yesterday to strike at Iranian cities with its own threat of retaliation against major Iraqi industrial centers. Iraqi civilians and foreign technicians and workers were warned to keep clear of industrial targets.

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-- Tehran probably will time attacks against industrial and military targets in the designated cities to precede its planned offensive. The Iranian Air Force is no match for Iraq's so Tehran will probably call on Iraqi Shia agents to carry out suicide attacks.

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Iran has publicly noted that the Iraqi threat was made "simultaneously" with the visit to Baghdad by Assistant Secretary of State Murphy. Tehran asserted that this constitutes further proof of US-Israeli support for Iraq's President Saddam Husayn.

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